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*From Yosemite Falls*

Y O S E M I T E  
*An Ode*

BY  
GEORGE STERLING

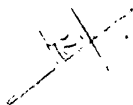


WITH  
*A Cover in Color After the Painting by*  
H. J. BREUER

AND  
*Illustrations After Photographs by*  
W. E. DASSONVILLE



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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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*After the painting by H. J. BREUER:*

YOSEMITE *On the cover*

*After photographs by W. E. DASSONVILLE:*

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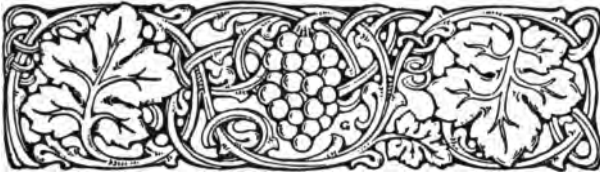




# YOSEMITE







## Y O S E M I T E

### I

**B**EAUTY, whose face and mystery we seek,  
Forever longing and forever foiled,—  
Whose praise the voices of our art would speak,  
And in whose faith all art and love have toiled,  
Be gracious, where in vain,  
Here at thy noblest fane,  
Where silent summits lift,  
I heap thine altar-stone with humble flow'rs,  
The mute bestowal of my happier hours—  
The hours that held thy pain,  
The heart-ache of thy presence and its stress.  
Be gracious to the giver and the gift,  
And be thy ruth  
Some aspect of thine inner loveliness  
Or instant blaze  
Of sunlight on the marbles of thy truth,  
Where I may stand and gaze

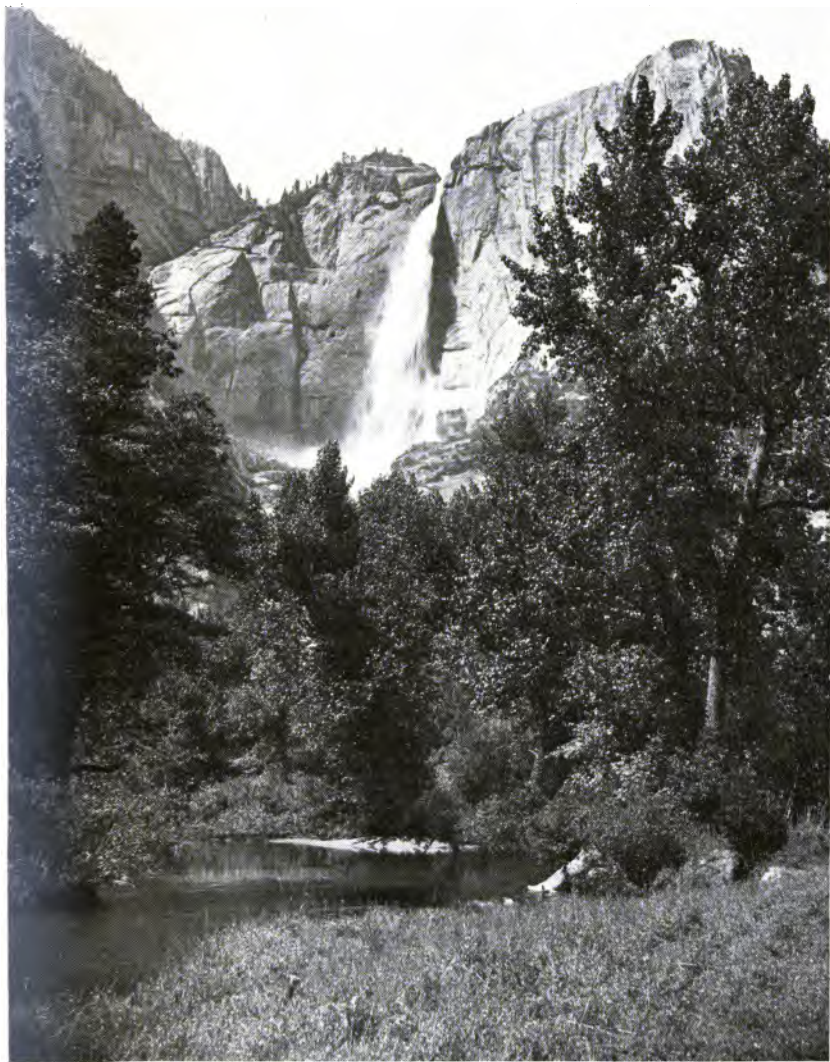
Ere following night confess  
 How art betrays us, even in its youth,  
 And of thy sudden vision and its bliss  
 We give but broken news and songs amiss.

♦

The primal gleam  
 Of thy far wings on Time's remoter skies  
 Drew first man's eyes  
 To that high star which is the light of Dream.  
 Dimly he saw  
 Thy splendor past the range of brutish law,  
 And slowly found the trace  
 And latency of thee  
 In fire and morning and the lily's cup,—  
 In quiet waters and the lifted sea,—  
 In his beloved's face,  
 With eyes like those of the awakened fawn.  
 So grew his adoration, dawn and dawn,  
 Sunset and sunset slowly storing up  
 Their unforgotten flame  
 And nacre in his soul's deep dwelling-place,  
 Till at the last he named thee with thy name.

♦

Thou, too, art bond to Change,  
 And we, the far descendants of the brute,



*The Yosemite Falls*

100

Find ever in thy realm the new and strange,  
 Our vision of thee deepening with the years,  
 And with our hearts that sorrow and transmute.  
 By duty and the alchemy of tears,

By all our nobler fears,  
 We find thy graces for a time withheld—  
 Honor and gentleness and faith in man,  
 And self to self's own sacrifice impelled,  
 And Love whose gaze grows upward, star by star.  
 And what the farther glories of thy Plan  
 We know not, thou whose wings go forth so far!

But though thou be  
 The daughter and the phantom of man's soul,  
 Our hearts acknowledge thee,  
 And thy last flight shall be the human goal.

II

Not on Romance's hills,  
 Forsaken by the lover and the lute,  
 Nor pure Illyrian rills,  
 Nor western islands sung by lips long mute,  
 Is thy last secrecy and utmost throne,  
 Whose morning snows thou hast.  
 Though one should seek thy temple, zone by zone,  
 In this far valley would he kneel at last,



The world-wide questing done.  
 Here shall the seeker scan  
 The mighty chancel of thy holy place,  
 Not as the fanes of man,  
 Whose marble is a mist before Time's sun,—  
 Whose term the years allot,—  
 Whose ruins man shall trace,  
 But as a House to be when Time is not.

♦

O terrible, abiding and august,  
 The walls wherefrom thine eagles have their path!  
 Bastions sublime, cliffs inaccessible  
 To giants in their wrath!  
 O summits lifted unto endless Good!  
 Heights that the hands of Law shall not annul  
 When all the pyramids are trodden dust!  
 Well were it that the fabled seraph stood  
 With quenchless sword before the shielded portal,  
 Crying, "Bare ye your heads and transient feet,  
 For ye are face to face with the Immortal,  
 The beauty which to gaze on is to live!"  
 Lo! here sublimity and beauty meet,  
 Meet in a final covenant and give  
 Unto man's heart and soul for everlasting  
 The sum and measure of their deathless grace,—

The guerdon of their good,  
 A promise and a portent, a forecasting  
 Of those far halls that yet shall house the race,  
 When self and night have died in Brotherhood.

O domes and towers and stupendous walls!  
 O voices of auroral waterfalls!  
 Sierran thunderheads of cloud or stone  
 That share the heavens as a realm o'erthrown!  
 How high your ancestry in Nature's art!  
 Here once the unfathomable granite lay  
     Ungraven to the day  
 And burdened with deep rivers of the ice.  
 But age by age slow billows rent apart  
 The cold foundations and the chiselled flanks,  
     Till pinnacle and tower  
     Told from their westward ranks  
 Where sank the abysmal quarries of the Power.  
     O patient centuries  
     That with so vast device  
     Frame strongholds such as these!  
 O battlements arisen to the sky,  
 Whence gods might chant to the departing sun  
     Hymns of oblivion,  
 Or iron litanies of worlds that die!

III

Here skyward gazing from the Valley's floor  
 One sees the imperishable ramparts soar  
     To base the doming blue;  
 Yet here the noon takes not the vestal dew  
 In emerald gardens walled with majesty  
 And groves that were when Tyre was tyrannous—  
     A dusk from sorrow free,  
 A haunt of fauns where care seems not to be  
     Nor any need of words.  
 O refuge green and home unperilous  
 In meadows ringed about with happy birds,  
 Where butterflies are given all their will,—  
     Where ferny fronds are curled,  
 Shadowed by crags whose fall would shake the world!  
     O whisperings that stir,  
 In slender crests of the aeolian fir,  
 From winds that mourn in music, and are still!  
 Recesses where the feet of Time are slow,  
 Dwelt in by flowers whose name we would not know!



But voices come that urge us from your peace,  
 Where the inviolable waterfall  
     Ere winter give it cease,  
 Shakes all day long a thunder from its wall,



*The Bridal Veil Falls*

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Or in the darkness, like a Titan's ghost,  
Moans as the sea on some tormented coast.

Hark then its call!  
To that high music give your souls in keeping!  
Ascend at dawn to that uplifted place  
Whence the doomed torrent, from its eyrie leaping,  
Takes virgin vesture and immortal grace.

Beauty surpassing all!  
Splendor of whiteness, foam of pearls that crash  
To rainbow-mist on barriers immense!  
Iris and veils of amethyst that lash  
The eternal granite in magnificence!  
Can eyes behold you save with rapture wet,  
Or turn them from your glory and forget?

❖

O falling rivers, beautiful in doom!  
Your lofty raiments sway  
As mountain-winds fling wider to the day  
The sounding fabric of a stony loom.  
Walls that endure, waters that pass away!  
Peaks that are silent, streams that sunward call  
From thundrous caldrons moulded not by hands!  
Waters that flow to other men and lands,  
Till, ocean clouds, ye take the heavens again,  
And the Sierran rain

Quivers once more upon the mountain wall!  
 Ye come and pass and come again—ah! so  
     Do mortals come and go?  
 And is the passing and returning all?  
     O secret path of man!  
 O butterfly above the waterfall!  
 O lizard peering from El Capitan!  
 Ashes of sunset, altar-fires of morn,  
 Seasons of doom, and surge of wings reborn!

IV

Beauty on Heaven's nectar and Earth's bread  
 Miraculously feeds.  
 Her elder pathway leads  
 To that acceptant spot  
 Where scorn of any simple thing is not,  
 And gods on dust and man on stars have fed.  
 Yet needs she heights to test her pinions' pow'r,  
 Ascendant from the glow-worm and the flow'r  
     To heavens cloud-emppearled,—  
     To thrones of azure air  
 And snows from which the morning greets the world.  
 Look down, and see the grasses in her care;  
 Then from this granite and tremendous dome  
 Gaze eastward to the mountains in their might.

Far down the torrents foam;  
 Far up the eagles float;  
 Far off the enormous ramparts wait the night,  
 Unsentineled, untroubled and remote.  
 Southward to where the desert waits in death,  
 And north to lonely Shasta's stormy breath,  
 The fortresses of the eternal run,  
 Unaltered by the lightnings and the sun.  
 Thence the young rivers hasten to the deep,  
     And there the advancing day  
 Gathers its legions for their seaward sweep.  
 Thence go the winds like angels forth to slay,  
 And there all night the avalanches sleep.

❖

Now lies the noon upon those fields of stone  
 And forests where the wind seems glad to cease.  
 Below, the snowy cataract alone,  
     Though here unheard, is loud.  
     Above, a single cloud  
 Rears on the turquoise cavern of the sky  
 Its towering pearl and alabaster throne.  
 The vast, ineffable Sierran peace  
     Holds not a sigh,  
 Where the stilled soul accepts her large release  
 From memories that sorrow ere they die.



Ah! human heart, that hast in store such tears!  
 Put by thy grief beside these lucid fountains!  
 Forget the sadder voices of thy years!  
 Thy refuge is the everlasting mountains,  
 Thy respite the compassion of their night,  
 And crystal voices lifted to thine ears  
 From those clear springs of loveliness and light.  
     Far off, the cities roar;  
 Far down, the world awaits thee, and its pain:  
 Have rest, ere ancient burdens be once more,  
 And silence, ere the tumult wake again!

The swirling river murmurs to the fir  
     And balsamed shadows stir;  
     Far up the afternoon  
 Floats the frail silver of the day-moon's dome.  
     On summits glacier-hewn  
 The reawakened winds begin to roam  
     Sweet with the forest's myrrh,  
 And casting on the world an undertone  
     So deeper than their own!  
 Follow, beneath the granite's rugged crown—  
 O boiling gorges and victorious roar  
 Of lion-throated torrents pouring down  
 In sounding onset to the valley-floor!



*Twilight*



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White bridals of the water and the air,  
 As the rent crystal sweeps to choral foam!  
     Oh! whiter than the star  
     With no horizon-home,  
 That sets not, though the truceless morning come!  
     And fairer still than these  
     Or surf of western seas,  
 Thy rainbow, like an angel's scimitar,  
 Slaying with beauty till the soul is dumb  
 For lack of that high speech the seraphs know!  
 By what acclaim shall man acknowledge this,  
 And with what songs give raiment to his bliss?  
     O floods and hues that flow!  
 O chords and voices of the deathless dead,  
 And visioned music of their lyric rite,  
 When Beauty's altar shone with wilder light,  
 And singing lips on richer milk were fed!

V

The hermit thrush has fluted from his tree,  
 Unanswered in the quietude. The sun  
 Goes forth on scarlet thresholds to the sea.  
 The many shadows gather unto one,  
 Paving the Valley in solemnity.  
     The darkness does not fall,

But rising slow, the tidal shadow drowns,  
 One after one, the ledges and the crowns,  
 The graven cliffs, the ramparts and the spires.  
 The world's arisen shade hath buried all,  
 Save where, to us, the last of day's far fires,  
     Ere sunset flee,  
 High on the headland of the South Dome lies.  
 O giant bulk! O monarch of our skies!  
 Soaring in rose from twilight's purple sea!  
 Thine afterglow, the memory of day,  
     Can but a little stay;  
 But in our souls the glory may not cease,  
     One with ethereal things—  
 The torrent's song, the cedar's whisperings,  
     The dawn's divine increase,  
 The loneliness and mystery and peace  
 Of evening mountains watched from far away. . .

On snows and pinnacle and river lies  
 The vast Sierran night, augustly dumb.  
 Keep vigil, ere the faithful morning come  
     Across Nevada's skies.  
 Below the moonless heavens deeply starred,  
 The forests sleep, unhaunted by the wind;  
     The lone, Titanic peaks

Between the stars and forest stand at guard.  
 What is it that the yearning planet seeks—  
 This homeless world that wanders lost and blind?  
 She finds not any solace in the night  
     Nor haven for her flight:  
 Let us forget the cold abyss, and turn  
     To where man's hearthstones burn . . .  
     Far eastward breaks the light  
 On cities rising to their endless toil,  
     On multitudes whose eyes  
     The Vision flies—  
 Serfs to the waiting engines and the soil.  
 And little children to the untimely task  
 Stumble at dawn, and know their masters sleep.  
     O blind and bartered poor!  
 Must these things be forever, though we ask  
 Why ye to tawdry pleasures and false arts  
     Must turn your cheated hearts?  
     To these, and less,  
 Barred from our earth's exalting loveliness.  
 For alway must the monstrous Scheme endure  
 That keeps the many to their labor bound—  
 Banished from these clean heights and gracious ground?  
 Shall not the atoning season come at last  
 When any son of earth may lift his face

To battlements of this transcendent place—  
 Freed from the hateful dungeons of the Past?  
 O hungered mouths unfed  
 From that immortal urn whose holy flood  
 Is Beauty's holier blood!  
 O sacrament of her terrestrial bread!  
 O Valley waiting through the wistful years,  
 The sure though distant tread  
 Of those young armies of the Comrade State!  
 Fair lands reconsecrate,  
 And toils that yet shall end in happy tears!  
 Under the midnight's arch,  
 Slowly those ranks are forming for the march,  
 Ere the Night falter and the legions are  
 Led on and upward by their morning star.

The morning star! Now eastward on the night  
 Her pure, unstirring light  
 Glows like the matin taper of a nun.  
 Arcturus sets. The Pleiades, upborne  
 On the wide surf of morn,  
 Join shuddering the rout of stars begun  
 By those red swords made vanguard to the sun.  
 The Valley lies below us like a cup,  
 Filled with the wine of Twilight and her dream.



*Morning—the Half-Dome*



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Nevada flames. The mountain walls send up  
 Their eagles on the morning, ere the gleam  
 Of the great day-star fall on wood and stream

From south to north

What golden wings, what argent feet go forth  
 On heaven and radiant snows!

What archangelic flights

Of seraphim from everlasting heights,—  
 From citadels colossal, where the song

Of giant winds is strong,

And, washed in timeless fire, the granite glows  
 With silver and unutterable rose!

O vaster Dawn, ascendant and sublime,

That past the peaks of Time

And midnight stars' array,

Dost bear the magnitude of skies to be,

What hopes go forth to thee!

O glad, unrisen Day!

The soul, an eagle from its eyrie yearning,  
 Goes up against the splendor and the burning—

Goes up, and sees afar the world made free!

O liberty to come!

What trumpets shall announce thee on what glooms?

What lips now dumb

Shall sing thine ancient victories and dooms,  
And in what halls  
Shall man set up an altar to thy star?  
Yea! though the time be far,  
Shall not thy song be lifted to these walls  
And on these peaks shall not thy banners shine?  
O Dawn divine!  
On eastern skies I see thy chariots hurled,  
And on the reeling night  
The legions of thy light,  
With morning! morning! morning! on the world!

THE END

[ 16 ]

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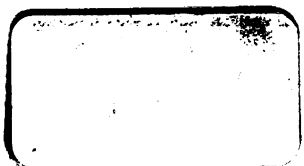








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